

Werner Schug:

The American Offensive in the Winter of 1944/45 in Altforweiler

Warfare is an evil thing, the perplexities of which remain in our memories for a lifetime. But the succeeding generations would probably address questions about this history that we can't correctly and objectively answer. Consequently, as long as further evidence of the time lives on for that purpose, this evidence will be investigated and firmly held.

On December 1, 1944 American tanks and infantry came from Berweiler down the Totenweg in our town. Not all of the inhabitants had followed the evacuation order, and remained in the town. With fear and anxiety they had awaited the arrival of the troops. All of the families in the upper village, the middle village, the Gewinn and Felsberger Street stayed where they were. For those families which had no relatives in the German army it was not so difficult to contemplate the departure of the Hitler regime.

In December of 2000 an Altforweiler citizen Josef Meyer (Balzen Seppe) who was 13 years old during the war, and well remembered correctly the names of the families who remained in our town during the fighting. These people were stuffed into Peter Becker's house on Mühlenweg, now called Sonnenweg. They had to provide for themselves any scanty rations that they could find. The nerve wracking burden of the people was very great because of the confined space and the great need. Ursula Jung, born into the Bro family, was 18 years old at the time and also happened to be one of these interned persons, described these catastrophic circumstances. In the house was one toilet for nearly 80 people who had to clean themselves with a bucket of water brought from a nearby stream. For the old people it was a difficult winter. The old and the sick were allowed to sleep in the few beds and also some others when possible. For meals there was an ample supply of potatoes which were stored in the cellar, and later on what the American soldiers threw away. Josef Meyer and Ursula Jung named the following persons as those who were interned.

Barbara Winter (Annasch Bäu)	Upper Village	1	Person
Nickel Meyer	"	3	Persons
Mathias Hilt (Matz)	"	4	"
Peter Lorson (Küfersch)	"	4	"
Regina Kissel, Oranna and Mother	"	3	"
Nickel Bedersdorfer (Thomesen)	Middle Village	4	"
Hans Bedersdorfer	"	3	"
Peter Bro (Schnirches)	"	11	"
Johann Fery	"	7	"
Georg Guldener (Judengass)	Felsberger Street	3	"
Peter Meyer (In the cottage) and Mrs. Paquet, Berus	"	5	"
Peter Kunzler (Weiss)	"	4	"
Pastors Anna and Käthchin	Parsonage	2	"
Alois Meyer	On the Gewinn	5	"
Ottilia Kunzler (Marksman Tilla)	"	1	"
Mathilda Haas-Gersing (Schlembée Till)	"	1	"
Peter Steinmetz and Daughter Gretel	"	2	"
N. N. Stein (Klena Matzés, Widower)	"	1	"
Nickel Poncelet	"	6	"
Gretel Haas (Gretel Hütter)	Felsberger Street	1	"
Josef Gammel (Gammel's Tailor)	"	1	"

Besides these 72 people, approximately 15-20 people came from Neuforweiler, Lisdorf and Holzmühle. The Bäckerei Haas family with 6 people, the Michels with three and the Junks with three persons came from Neuforweiler.

Because of the very catastrophic circumstances for these many people, after four or five days the Americans moved several into several other houses above the intersection in the middle of town. Usually it was not their own houses since these were occupied by soldiers. The Americans got water for these frontline soldiers from the city springs in the Upper Village. They ran the water into two large tanks, disinfected it and used it to fill the radiators of the Jeeps and trucks. The column of vehicles often passed through the intersection in the middle of town.

At the onset of the heavy shelling the roar of the shells was especially terrifying on Ottersberg Street as well as on Auf der Retz and Judengass Street. Altforweiler was taken by the 378th Infantry Regiment under Colonel Metcalf. (Edgar Cristaffel: Krieg am Westwall 1944/45, p. 238)

From the beginning of December until the middle of March artillery batteries and health facilities were stationed in our town. When the Germans started the Ardennes offensive on December 15 the American troops withdrew from the Saar front and moved to Luxembourg and Belgium, the situation changed. Shortly before Christmas, because of the Ardennes offensive (Battle of the Bulge), the people had to move to Überherrn and had to take the cattle with them. They were taken by the Americans soldiers to houses along the railroad tracks in Überherrn.

When the Ardennes offensive was going to be lost by the Germans toward the end of the year and the flight to Eifel Mountain between Trier and Cologne had been started, the citizens of Altforweiler were allowed to return to their own village. Now they could do better with their scanty provisions, and bread could again be produced in the reopened bakeries when flour became available. The many Americans in the village determined the quality of life for us, and there gradually developed a better relationship with the soldiers. In the drawing room of the Rupp Hotel there was a military hospital. Also in the cellar of Nickel Fries-Rink on Landstrasse a place was cleared out for an aid station with a doctor with whom I personally met when he visited here in 1953.

Wilhelm Kornelius, the pastor from Berus, and Johannes Kirschwend from Wadgassen, who served the interned people in Überherrn, temporarily held Holy Mass in the Altforweiler church. An American officer permitted this when the living situation behind the Saar front had eased off. Pastor Kornelius was brought from Berus to Altforweiler in a Jeep by American soldiers. Adolf Bro reported that even the Americans attended the Mass and went for communion. Everybody in this war was in danger and prayers were made on behalf of life and peace in this time of emergency. A piece of shrapnel from a gun killed several American soldiers on Kappesheck Street. There were also losses as a result of German artillery. The former military doctor who visited our town in June of 1953 confirmed this to me. He looked for a piece of ground on the left side of the street toward Roten Hügel and took a picture of it. A friend who had been with him was killed by a mortar shell.

After the breakdown of the front on the Saar in the middle of March the situation changed in our town. After a stay of three months the Americans moved farther into Germany and left behind large amounts of cartridges, powder, cable and wooden munitions crates which in these poor times were put to good use.

The American physician, Dr. Richard Hunton who was then a soldier, marched into Altforweiler on December 1, 1944. He was severely wounded in our town on the Unteren Gewann. After the war he wrote down his war stories in the book *E Pluribus Unum*.

Near the end of the year 2000 he fortuitously came upon the name of our town of Altforweiler.

Immediately the events of 1944 were refreshed in his memory. Very soon he was in contact with Walter Oehling of Altforweiler and a few weeks later Walter was in possession of his war stories. Eugen Mirbach of Altforweiler translated into English the sections relevant to our town, beginning with Berweiler down through the crossing at Ittersdorf - Totenweg Street.

Dr. Richard Hunton wrote the following:

In the meantime, our company had been spotted at the crossroads by a mortar squad in Berus which began to plaster us heavily as we crouched in ditches along the road and in a communicating trench about two hundred feet from the crossroads. As there was no possibility of moving out until the tanks returned, we were forced to sweat it out, depending mainly on the inaccuracy of the gunners for protection. I managed to calm my jumpy nerves by chewing a quantity of gum, gritting my teeth a little tighter every time another shell landed nearby. In the company deployment pattern, my position happened to be located behind a scrawny bush by the roadside, affording little or no protection from the high trajectory mortar shells.

My discomfiture was increased when one of the tanks suddenly returned and parked in the road a few feet to my right. Knowing that mortar and artillery squads almost invariably aimed for a tank whenever one was in range, I expected any minute to be blown to bits by a vicious barrage of shells. Before any such event, however, the rest of the tanks returned, most of them carrying three or four bloody infantrymen who had come out second best in the skirmish at Berus. There were also a couple of prisoners who had been taken from the lightly defended city. These poor fellows almost collapsed from heart failure as some of our non-coms tried to decide whether to shoot them on the spot or send them to the rear with one of our badly needed men. Their death sentences were finally commuted and they were sent back to battalion headquarters.

After the tanks had returned to the crossroads, our scattered company reorganized and followed them for about a kilometer along a muddy rutted road until we came to the outskirts of Altforweiler, a village of about 900 inhabitants, although very few of them were anywhere to be seen on this day. Here we began simultaneously to fire into the surrounding wooded area as well as into the already shattered houses which lined both sides of the main street, in the event that snipers were located in any of these positions. Although the Germans had made a hasty retreat, they lost no time in setting their sights back on Altforweiler, for just about the time when we had reached the east edge of town, screaming meemies and mortar shells began to rain down upon us in a blitzkrieg counterattack.

Realizing that our ranks would have to be consolidated in order to resist any force of considerable size and strength, our squad had just turned around on the sidewalk when a terrifying scream from the air, a blinding flash, and the shattering explosion of a mortar shell sent me sprawling backwards into the street, dazed, numb, and bleeding. With a warm sensation around my right arm telling me immediately where I had been hit, I tried to move the arm, but to no avail. All that would respond to my attempts at movement were my fingers, for which I was thankful. Obviously, my first reaction was to call for a medic, being too dazed and shocked to do much for myself. My request for assistance went unheeded for a minute or two after someone had shouted back for me to hold my horses because I wasn't the only one that needed a medic.

While lying there in the street waiting for help, I was able to see the gaping shell hole, a scant five yards to the right of the place where I had been hit. Meanwhile, more shells were violently exploding nearby as two members of my platoon ventured hurriedly over to where I lay, picked up my limp body, and carried me across to the other side of the street where several fellows were crouched in a large barn, trying to find protection from the rain of mortar shells landing in the street. Once inside the barn, I was propped up in a corner near the door where one of the fellows set to work cutting several layers of clothing from my shattered arm. This procedure took quite some time, for I was wearing two suits of heavy woolen underwear, an O.D. shirt, a sweater, and a field jacket - five layers in all. After everything had been cut away, I could plainly see the reason for my predicament - a gaping hole passing clear through my upper arm from back to front.

About this time the medic arrived and gave me a shot of morphine to ease the pain which was then becoming quite intense, even causing me to bite my tongue in order to divert my attention away from the painful wound. My first aid kit was then opened and I was fed the enclosed sulfa tablets, at the same time drinking the entire canteen of water that I had gotten from the tank trap earlier in the day. Sulfa powder from the kit was not used on the wound for some reason or other, but my arm was bandaged and a sling securely attached. One of the fellows had cut away my pack and another had brought a pillow from the adjoining house so that I could lie down a while until it was possible to leave. In spite of the severe pain, it was really humorous to hear two or three of the fellows ask if they could have my left over ammunition. It should have been clearly evident that I would have no further immediate use for it! Since ammunition was becoming scarce, they seemed quite delighted to get some of mine.

While lying there on the dirt floor of the barn, I made a statement to the effect that my services hadn't lasted very long, but the rest of the fellows hastened to assure me that I was far more fortunate than they, because I was getting out of the terrible mess while they had to push farther on until it came their time to go also.

After waiting for an hour or so the bombardment slacked off enough so that I stood a good chance of getting back to the company CP, about a half block to the rear. I was helped to my feet and then started unsteadily along the littered sidewalk, trying to stay as close to the buildings as possible. When I was about half way to my destination, I heard a loud rumbling noise overhead followed by a tremendous crash a few feet directly in front of me. Loosened by the impact of a mortar shell, an entire tile roof, weighing several hundred pounds, had fallen in a huge heap onto the place where I would have been standing two or three steps later. Badly shaken by the incident, I continued around the pile and came finally to the company headquarters where I found three or four other fellows, including my squad leader, Red LaChance, in a very bad condition. I went on into the shattered living room, stepped cautiously and painfully over a rolled up rug, and sat down on a sofa by the far wall. I didn't like the idea of dripping blood all over the poor family's good sofa, but there was nothing else to be done. It didn't really make much difference since the rest of the house was practically wrecked anyway. Once I got up and went over to see how my squad leader was getting along, but he was in such terrible pain from a wound in his stomach, that he wasn't able to carry on a conversation. He just kept calling for more morphine.

Report of Company Commander Charles D. Crawford of Company I of the 378th Infantry Regiment of the 95th Infantry Division relating to events of Nov. 29 to Dec. 1, 1944:

At 1:00 o'clock in the afternoon of November 29, 1944 the Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. John E. Kelly, ordered that Company I, 378th Infantry would proceed from its holding positions in the town of North Falck toward the Sauberg, a high ridge along the rim of the Saar, about a mile ahead of us. We had proceeded about a half-mile when the Battalion commander called me on the radio and directed that I halt in place and await his arrival. He arrived very quickly in his Jeep and directed that Company I attack the Sauberg as soon as possible. He then got into his Jeep and returned to North Falck. I quickly assembled the platoon leaders, now all sergeants, and the tank platoon leader. We were now faced with a potentially difficult objective. The approach was over wide-open terrain that was cultivated as farmland during farming season. The approach was a steady rise in elevation to the highest point on the rim of the Saar basin. There was no place to hide! The only way to attack the objective was frontally, and with all the firepower we had. I directed the tank platoon leader to spread his 4 tanks about 25 yards apart. Company I men would fill the spaces between the tanks with every weapon we had. At my arm signal the tanks would start forward in line with I Company rifles, automatic rifles and light machine guns. I would signal open fire with a single rifle shot. The urgency of the attack left no time to get artillery fire support. The Battalion Commander apologized.

I gave the hand signal to start forward. I, with the radio operator, the First Sergeant and the First Aid man were between the two center tanks. We had moved forward approximately 300 yards and were now in easy rifle range of the top of the Sauberg. I fired a single shot from my carbine and all hell broke loose. The tanks opened up with their cannons and bow machine guns. Every weapon in I Company was firing straight ahead; the excitement has risen to the point that the men could no longer walk forward and were now in a slow run. The riflemen began to fix bayonets as we got closer to the Sauberg. The Battalion Commander was on the radio frantically asking for the situation. I reported that we should be on the objective shortly. He was concerned about how much of the fire was ours and how much was from the Germans. As we approached the crest of the ridge we came upon a long and deep tank trap. The trap had been hand dug and was about 12 feet deep and 16 feet wide. The trap ran out of sight in both directions. The Germans left foot prints in the mud on the other side, indicating that they intended to defend the ridge line, but gave up and made a hasty retreat when faced with overwhelming fire power that we laid down on the ridge. We could look down on Altforweiler and the entire Saar River valley. I reported to the Battalion commander that mission had been accomplished and that we had no casualties. His reply was "Good job" and to hold on to the high ground. This was our first battle in which we used the new tactic of "marching fire".

To secure what had been a perfect solution to a difficult problem, the tank leader on the right flank found a filled-in crossing of the tank trap and saw it as an opportunity to advance farther. A squad of I Company climbed aboard the tank and they proceeded at full speed to and into the town of Berus, about five hundred yards to our right. Knowing that Berus was still in the 1st Battalion zone of operation, I immediately dispatched a runner to direct that they return to the Sauberg at once. I notified the Battalion Commander and he agreed with what I had done. That blunder resulted in the death of our beloved First Aid man that we all knew as "Chief". He was a Hopi Indian of the Shoshone people of Pueblo Indians in northeastern Arizona. He was brought back from Berus on the back of the tank.

At 10:00 PM on the night of November 30th Company I was given the mission of capturing the small town of Altforweiler. The attack was to begin at 0630 hours the next morning. After spending a very cold, snowy and miserable night in the open on the Sauberg, the company launched the attack as scheduled. Formation for the attack was a platoon of 4 tanks that had been with the company for the past three days with a platoon of men riding on the tanks that would proceed down the steep incline and attack the town at the south end. The attack proceeded very well and pushed through the town to the road on the outskirts leading to Neuforweiler. At this point the lead personnel were brought under heavy mortar fire from an open and rolling field to the right front. After the mortar fire was silenced I reported

to the Battalion Commander that the objective had been taken and was directed to hold the position until further orders. Two men were killed and five were wounded from the mortar fire.

At about mid afternoon the Battalion Commander called me on the radio and asked "Do you think you can get back into Berus?" I answered that I was sure I could. He then ordered the attack to be launched as soon as possible. Platoon leaders were immediately called to a meeting and the attack order was issued. Berus was a small town of mostly residential homes where a fairly large group of farmers lived. It was located on the point of a ridge overlooking Altforweiler, Neuforweiler and a large area of open spaces toward the Saar River. Altforweiler and Berus were joined by a foot path up through some woods and a road running up the left side of Berus. The attack formation was quickly decided: send the platoon of tanks mounted by a platoon of riflemen up the road at a high speed to secure the ridge at the upper end where the church was located. I would take a platoon of I Company up the foot path through the woods and join the platoon with tanks at the church and leave the balance of the Company in Altforweiler in charge of the First Sergeant. The attack went as planned, resulting in inflicting heavy casualties on the Germans as they tried to escape from the ridge across the open field toward the Saar River. I reported to the Battalion Commander that the mission had been accomplished. He directed that Berus be held until the 1st Battalion relieved us. About 30 minutes later the 1st Battalion arrived and took control of Berus. Seven German soldiers and one officer were captured in the church steeple. They had artillery fire direction radios and had inflicted heavy casualties on the 1st Battalion over the past three days. All of the equipment was destroyed in the church yard. They also had bombarded us the night before when we were out in the open on the Sauberg. It was a great pleasure to return them to the rear as prisoners of war.

We returned to Altforweiler knowing full well that our next objective would be Neuforweiler at daylight the next morning.

**Statement from a report from Captain Dean Schumacher of the 155 mm
Howitzer Battery stationed in Altforweiler during the war:**

We were the best and most successful artillery battalion team out of 550 officers and men in the entire country.

On our way we spent nearly two months in Altforweiler, a town in Germany. It was an unusually long time, influenced by the "Battle of the Bulge" (German Ardennes offensive). Our usual tasks were expanded when the order came to create in the Germans the impression that our entire artillery was positioned toward Saarlautern and to the west of the Saar River. We set up a position in which two howitzers and two rapid firing artillery pieces would put on a thunder and lightning show for the Germans and other foreigners.

In another place Captain Schumacher wrote:

Our objective was reached. The place was never hotter than it was then! But then an unexpected mortar shell struck directly in front of us. That made it somewhat difficult. We positioned the guns in back of

the houses on the opposite side of the Roten Hügels. Our firing zone enabled that tactic. We found there that the Germans shot at everything even though by observation they could not see them.

Two light batteries of the 95th Division were close by. Their camouflage tactics were pitiful and they wondered why they were being shot at. On the previous night they had been hit hard. The houses that they occupied were very fashionable.

**Statement from a report of the 1st Battalion of the 378th Infantry Regiment
of the American 95th Infantry Division:**

Beginning with an attack on the town of Merten on November 29, 1944.

November 29, 1944

About 0800 the attack started according to plan. A Company approached Merten from the west and C Company from the east. B Company held its position. The town fell quickly under this organized attack and the companies immediately began to reorganize. Artillery and mortar bombardment from the right and the front showered the streets of Merten below. The battalion ambulance was hit by one of these artillery shells so that the wounded who were being attended had to be evacuated.

At about 1200 A Company attacked the heights north of Merten and took them, but suffered losses from a hostile machine gunner firing from the right flank.

The battalion spent the day getting reinforcements and attending to the battle casualties of the previous day. B and C Companies sent patrols toward A Company and to the front and set up an outpost in Merten.

On this day the 1st Battalion took the last town before the German border which could account for the extraordinary resistance. Forty six prisoners were taken and 16 of the enemy wounded. We had six wounded and registered one missing.

November 30, 1944

Hostile mortar fire restricted our freedom of movement for the entire day. We spent the morning reorganizing the troops. The patrols on the flanks and to the front were expanded. One enemy position was found to be assembled about 600 yards southeast of Merten, but they were successfully destroyed when fired upon by D Company 81 mm mortars. So a possible enemy counterattack was discovered by the time they had organized close by.

About 1200 we received orders to take Berus ourselves. A Company proceeded to the northeast spur of the Onderwaldes (a woods between Merten and Berviller), and B Company took up a position southeast of them.

At about 1400 A Company stormed forth, supported by D Company with mortar and machinegun fire. The enemy struck back with machinegun fire and a heavier artillery attack. A Company requested an

artillery barrage that inflicted very heavy losses on the unprotected enemy. As the barrage was suspended, A Company advanced and successfully took the heights west of Berus. The enemy made the expected limited counterattack which A Company successfully defended against. Protected by darkness, B Company relieved A Company which then withdrew toward the north from Merten. We received orders to take the heights between Bisten and Berus the following morning.

The battalion losses on this day were two killed and 23 wounded.

December 1, 1944

In the early morning hours A Company, B Company and C Company took up an attack position in the Beruser Woods with A Company as reserve. Our goal was to set up an ideal defensive position with well camouflaged artillery positions and a far reaching system of trenches. From this labyrinthine masonry emplacement the battalion received the stiffest resistance that had so far been brought against it. As soon as C Company rushed forward they were met with very heavy artillery and machinegun fire. All officers and company commanders were disabled.

The Battalion S-2 met with the little company again and pulled them back to a secure position. A Company stormed forward and was successful in setting up a planned defensive position in a place that former airforce personnel had occupied. After they had advanced about 1000 yards, they were caught in the crossfire of an unknown number of machineguns, and more 20 and 40 mm guns fired low at them. This hail of fire came from the front and from the right and left flanks.

Because of this gunfire B Company was forced to withdraw under cover of a thick fog that was moving in. Then they struck in the direction of Berus where they relieved I Company that had taken the town earlier. From their reserve position A Company began to move forward in order to relieve C Company, but enemy gunfire made that impossible.

A and B Companies moved back toward Merten where they reorganized and remained in the early night. B Company erected an outpost in Berus. During the fighting on this day, and based on the severe losses during the prior two days and the unavailability of replacements for the present, provisional troops were made out of cooks, aid men and anti-tank personnel who were placed under the command of the platoon leaders. These troops fought as riflemen in the march to the Saar.

The continuation of the attack was planned for sunrise the following morning. C and A Companies had to advance at the beginning of the early morning dawn in a southwesterly direction from Berus from where the attack would be started. For this operation the division tanks were placed in readiness. During the night the division artillery, reinforced by corps artillery, bombarded the enemy positions with heavy fire.

Our losses in the progress of the day were considerable because of the advantageous positions that the enemy held. Eight of our men were killed and 44 wounded. We estimated that ten enemy soldiers were killed and seven prisoners were taken.

December 2, 1944

The attack began about 0800 and the next military goal was met with only moderate enemy resistance since most of the enemy had withdrawn during the night toward Uberherrn. B and C Companies

controlled Bisten and Berus. In the afternoon we began an attack with Sandhof and Sablonhof as our objective. A Company was regrouped in Bisten and was advancing toward the high ground of the village to the outpost. B and C Companies moved to the powerful position of Berus from where they initiated the attack which was supported by a column of tanks. C Company was in front, followed by B Company about 100 yards to the rear.

While crossing the open fields the both companies came under rather heavy mortar and machinegun fire. From Sablonhof two enemy 88 mm guns fired point blank at the attacking companies with crushing effect. B and C Companies had to advance through the fire and take Sandhof, one of their goals for the day, after they had rendered harmless a 20 mm gun and two 76 mm guns.

All of these had been with direct fire at a range of less than 1000 yards. The order was given to hold these positions for the night. A Company proceeded under cover of night to Berus. A connection with the 3rd Battalion was established in Neuforweiler. A command was given to attack at sunrise in the direction of the Saar toward a railroad bridge in our area and a unnamed town south of Lisdorf. During the activities of this day we were worried about the unprotected right flank since we received more fire from this flank than from the front.

Altogether 62 prisoners were taken and 45 enemy soldiers were killed or wounded. Our losses were two killed and 21 wounded.

December 3, 1944

Before daybreak A Company moved to a reserve position 500 yards southeast of Sandhof. While advancing in this position we encountered some enemy troops who were there and forced these surrounded men into a wild flight.

These skirmishes with the Germans lasted about six hours since they fired from behind trees, fired machinegun salvos and then quickly disappeared. B Company and the rest of C Company, supported by D Company, drew back to get organized. The situation with A Company led to a fire fight and left the battalion without reserve. In the protection of the higher situated western provinces on the Saar the enemy directed heavy machinegun fire on the battalion. Vicious mortar and artillery fire came over the river from the steel and concrete implacements of the Siegfried Line.

After the higher situated terrain was taken, B and C Companies fought their way slowly into Holzmühle. B Company advanced then in the direction of the railroad bridge and found it still intact. As the first men approached it the bridge blew into the air through previously fitted and electrically ignited high explosives. After the enemy had settled in the woods A Company received an order to advance in the direction of the higher ground and then with riflemen protected the right and rear flanks of the battalion.

They attempted to come out of the woods in the early morning light but were covered with mortar and artillery fire. They withdrew back into the woods and waited until night to make a change. The outposts reached the town and in the course of the night patrols were sent to the river bank and the right flank. The enemy on our right harassed continually from the direction of Wadgassen. The entire day we received heavy fire to the lower area and it increased during the entire night. During the events of this day the exhausted battalion had fought its way to the Saar under heavy fire from the Siegfried Line. All companies were only a shadow of their earlier effectiveness, and the men who were there felt their exhaustion and noticed that the limits of their effectiveness had been reached.

Our losses ere 5 killed and 30 wounded. Forty three prisoners had been taken and 25 enemy killed or wounded.

In the book "Westfront 1944" by Helmut Ritgen, that was put at my disposal by Helmut Schmitt of Berus, there is a contribution written by Lieutenant Monz regarding the events in Berus and Alforweiler as seen from the German military perspective.

The daily account of November 29 regarding the attack by the Americans seems to be in error since the reports of the local citizens and from Dr. Hunton state that it was on December 1, 1944.

Here follows a statement (Pages 203 to 205) from the before mentioned book in these words:

Monz Armored Attack Group

Appropriate orders were transmitted to Lieutenant Monz with his 29 SPWs (armored personnel carriers) on the morning of November 28 by the Commanding General of the XIII SS-Corps in Bous. The Commanding General had expected tanks which were considered essential for the counterattack, but was disappointed to see only armored personnel. The Corps had counted on an attack of the enemy from the west and southwest of Felsberg and Saarlautern. Indeed the regiment had located and put in place the green and exhausted 347th Volksgrenadiere Division in the area of Felsberg-Altforweiler and they were poorly armed and without tank defense. Lieutenant Monz received an order to hold the Sauberg (Hill 377) and the narrow main street in Felsberg.

With their advance through Völkingen the tank personnel with all available motorized vehicles helped to evacuate the population in nearby Köllertal. At noon they had driven to the west bank of the Saar near Picard, and had sought to join the troops already there and through reconnaissance of the terrain clarified the combat situation to the west. The result was discouraging. Far and wide there were few German soldiers, without staff except for the remains of a regimental staff in Felsberg which had no connections with their own units and still had misgivings about the situation. Sauberg, Villing and Ittersdorf were not free of the enemy. Many of the dispersed soldiers moved in the direction of Wadgassen from there. Bad weather held enemy air attacks at a distance. The tank personnel were able to rest in Picard.

Renewed reconnaissance on the morning of November 29 revealed enemy tanks in Schreckling and infantry with heavy weapons in Berviller, and apparently fortified in Berus. In the church in Altforweiler a PAK (anti-tank gun) was recognized while the Americans were taking a break on Ostrand von Düren. Lieutenant Monz ordered his own platoon to withdraw from the western slope of the Sauberg where they were entrenched and to leave the SPWs in the protection of the rear slope. The assembled Volksgrenadiere were to dig emplacements for the still mobile platoon.. Lieutenant Monz remembered it this way:

With two platoons, accompanied by mortars and tank mounted cannons, I went on an attack around Altforweiler where an anti-tank gun didn't come shooting and alerted a surprised group of infantrymen. Because of the light resistance we went farther toward Berus where we fired on some running separated infantry who had rushed out of houses and tried to escape on foot and by their vehicles. Our considerable fire power finally came to support us. At that time I estimated the enemy to be not more

than a company. We had to bring out two SPWs and after returning to the remaining company had one dead and several wounded. We remained camouflaged along the streets of west Felsberg.

On November 29 the American division continued their attack on Saarlautern with two regiments. The 1st Battalion of the 378th Infantry Regiment took Merten and the 2nd Battalion went through the unoccupied Saar heights region and took Berus where they were immediately hit with a counterattack by the Monz group. After a fierce battle the 2nd Battalion suffered severe losses, then pulled up for the night in a defensive position in a group of farms in order to reorganize by direction of the American general staff.

After a peaceful night in Felsberg there were only outposts remaining on the Sauberg. When by morning strong combat sounds became audible in the north, Monz attacked the apparently weakly defended Düren and outflanked it. Under fire protection of all available 75 mm KwKs (artillery pieces) and mortars the platoon moved aggressively from Upper Felsberg to the north, while the left platoon reported a column of enemy tanks without infantry approaching Schreckling. Immediately the attack was halted and all vehicles ordered back to Felsberg and we prepared to occupy trenches on the Sauberg. Back at the roadside both of the anti-tank squads which had been formed from non-com candidates remained in place.

From the spacious hilltop controlled by the company commander they pulled back drivers and passengers of combat and baggage vehicles toward Picard in order to return the fallen and wounded, about 50 or 60 men, apparently attacked by the few German soldiers who were in the vicinity of several kilometers, and had been without long range tank defensive weapons. Fortunately, low hanging clouds had kept the sky free from air attack, but everywhere one could see enemy infantry with tank support proceeding toward the east. In the afternoon the enemy 377th Infantry Regiment turned from St. Barbara toward Felsberg. The tank fire resulted in losses. The tanks remained outside of the tank-firing range. A call for help to the Corps by radio was futile. As the afternoon progressed the infantry presence increased and at the same time Felsberg would be taken from the north, but the company commander had to leave the Sauberg and take up a position in the outskirts of Felsberg. Here the rearguard succeeded in delaying a particularly stubborn knot of the assault group of the U.S. 377th Infantry Regiment. After the onset of darkness the Americans adjusted their activities. Overnight this group held the outskirts of Lower Felsberg with security in Picard and Lisdorf. The determination of the young soldiers under better leadership was astonishing. At the railroad embankment in Felsberg was a smokestack on the left with an old Hasen, and to the right a machinegun in place manned by a young novice. After a Sherman tank was shot up the platoon leader ran out under cover and slapped him on the shoulder. He nodded knowingly. For the third time we took a cigarette break.

With the lightening sky on December 1 the bombers appeared and bombed Saarlautern, Fraulautern and the bridge at Ensdorf. Subsequently the 95th American Division began their attack on Saarlautern and the Saar crossing. Saarlautern was defended by the remaining parts of three infantry divisions, part on the west bank of the river, with most in the west bank bunkers and east of them. The Monz group could set up a position on the eastern edge of Felsberg and the northern edge of Lisdorf about 1500 under cover of ground fog. Machinegun and mortar positions were brought in and all of the smokestacks were destroyed by tank fire. In order to disguise the uneasy weakness of our position two motorcycles with sidecars drove back and forth up and down different streets delivering ammunition.

On the night of December 2 the army group was ordered to withdraw from the Saar north of Saarlautern because of a deficiency of forces and ammunition. Lieutenant Monz did not realize that radio contact with the Corps had been cut off. The company secured Lisdorf early on December 2. They removed their positions on orders of the Corps when the Americans were approaching the bridge. The company

also received orders to immediately withdraw their tank training division over to Saarbrücken-Habkirchen.

After the reply to headquarters from the house in Bitten on December 4, the severely depleted 1st Company was sent immediately to the approach to Volksberg. However at dawn of December 5 orders were brought over on foot to hold up and assemble. In the afternoon the company marched over Pirmasens-Kaub toward Cochem on the Mosel

As horrible and terrifying that the events of war are, when men become brutal and lose their feelings, and when the laws of the Geneva Convention are completely disregarded, there comes a statement from Captain **Carl Ulsaker** of Company I of the 3rd Battalion of the 378th Infantry Regiment of the 95th Infantry Division:

December 1, 1944

After I Company had secured Altforweiler, I moved up to join them and as dusk approached, accompanied the company commander and a small group of his leaders a short distant east of town to make a reconnaissance for the next day's operation which we knew would be to attack Neuforweiler.

As we stood on a small rise peering through the gloom towards our next objective, we heard groans from a patch of brush nearby. One of the non-coms investigated and found a badly wounded German lying there. He turned to his runner and said, "Put the man out of his misery; the racket he's making will attract the enemy's attention".

The soldier raised his rifle to knock the German in the head with the butt. "Not that way", said the sergeant, "use the Kraut's rifle". The soldier then picked up the rifle of the German which was lying near him on the ground, and striking him with a mighty blow proceeded to knock out the German and to splinter the stock of the rifle. "See what I mean," said the sergeant. "You'd have broken your rifle and wouldn't have it to fight with tomorrow."

Georg Guldener who was 13 years old at the time, clearly and extensively described the events of that day. Living on Felsberger Street on the Judengasse in a single standing farmhouse, on orders of his father he went every day during the last days of November with three cows to the Bommerswies in order to escape seizure of them by the authorities. There in a depression they could not be seen from the street. Delegated powers of the authorities made the stables empty and large herds of cattle were driven to the right side of the Saar. In the evening he went back to the stable with the cows. In this manner he saved the cattle.

In the last three days of November three German soldiers stayed in the cellar with them overnight. These had taken up a position to the left of the Totenweges on the property that today is the home of Jürgen Englert. At that time there was a young soldier with striking blond hair. Georg Guldener found this man dead in that general area with another German soldier in April 1945 after the withdrawal of the Americans. They had been killed in the defensive battle of November 29-30, 1944.

On the last day of November several mortar shells landed right in their meadow. Dispersed German soldiers from the province came through Giljoms Wingert and demanded that he go home to the heights belonging to the enemy. In the last three days of November his father had gone with his Aunt Kathrin to spend the day in the Otterberg caves which were easy to get to from our house. At night they went home to take care of the cattle. Berus came first of all under artillery fire and then Felsberg. On the afternoon of December 1 tanks moved up the road toward Felsberg. Georg Guldener could not determine which side the vehicles were on because they were about 200 meters away. He acted carelessly in front of the stable so that he was recognized. The Americans placed two tanks right at the entrance. Shortly before that his father had pulled him into the stable and furiously reprimanded him.

By the time it was dark they returned over the field to their house. Everywhere there were shell holes from mortar strikes, the ground was black and smelled of gunpowder. All of the doors of the houses and barns stood open. The cattle, however, were intact in the stable. Everything was again closed up and they went down to the cellar. In late afternoon they heard a sharp knocking on the front door. His father opened it and before him stood American soldiers with weapons drawn. They ordered him and his aunt to come out with hands raised. They were taken to the crossing in town and then into Johann Fery's house. The shed and stable belonging to Guillaume Caspar burned and brightly lit up the street. Here in the cellar were the Frey family and the neighbor families Bro and Bedersdorfer, about 20 people altogether. Fifteen year old Josef Fery had a piece of mortar shrapnel in his leg and cried in pain. The Americans transported him along with other wounded to Metz in an ambulance. Everybody was then taken to Peter Becker's house to join the others who were already present there.

For four or five days everything was closed up tight by military law. The people who had cows in their houses asked permission to feed them. Whereupon the commanding officer came with several Jeeps and took them to their houses. As Georg Guldener and his father came to their house all of the doors were open and the cows were nowhere to be seen. At the father's request, a soldier with a Jeep took him to the Leinmauer where they supposed them to be and found them in the garden above an old church. Here they were lingering and gorging themselves on cabbages and other vegetables. Georg Guldener and his son led their cattle, one sow and one pig to the stable. Every day they were able to provide for their animal, milking two cows and providing for a young calf at the regular time of day.

From four to five days everybody had to stay in the house that was at that time on Mühlenweg. Based on the poor conditions the Americans placed several families in houses above the crossing. Most of these were strange houses since the soldiers had taken over their own houses. But the Guldener family were allowed to remain in their own house on Felsberger Street. After several days all of the civilian inhabitants suddenly had to go to Uberherrn. Those who had cows took them with them. As a result of the German Ardennes offensive in Luxembourg and Belgium, the American troops moved from the Saar front to Luxembourg since they feared that the military action there would intensify.

In Uberherrn all of the people from Altforweiler were taken to vacant houses west of the railroad track. Also the people from Berus, Neuforweiler and Lisdorf were there, so that it became very crowded. For the Guldener family the only vacancy was in the railroad station. They had to sleep on the benches in the waiting room, the cattle stood in a nearby barn and the sows and pigs occupied the men's rest room. The fodder for the cattle was very scanty in these houses along the rail siding, so at night they had to cross the tracks to the other side and pick up hay for the cattle. It was dangerous to move about outside of the blockade, and besides it was forbidden.

The people stayed in Uberherrn over Christmas and New Years until the end of January. In the drawing room of the Treibahr Hotel delousing with powder was carried out. Everywhere in these war zones clothing lice were prevalent because of a lack of cleanliness.

On a cold winter day they were allowed to return to Altforweiler. Still, the Guldener were turned away from the Haas Bakery. They had to be taken to Nickel Kunzler's house where the cattle were taken to the back yard through the house passage. From the garden of this house they now saw the reason why they had been forbidden to enter the house. Next to their house behind the Leinmauer was a huge gun, probably a 155 mm howitzer. Others like it were in the garden of the Haas Bakery, and on the other side of the Gammel's house stood another one. It was the same heavy artillery that was on Oranna Street, now called Ottersberg, and on Auf der Retz. These fired salvos periodically and simultaneously toward the provinces on the right of the Saar. From the back of the house Nickel Kunzler could easily observe all of this. The firing positions were well fortified with sandbags. When the Germans had discovered these positions they laid down a heavy artillery barrage on them. These firing positions were located near Bous. Only in the good cellars could one really be protected. The Americans suddenly changed their positions over night to an unknown place, so that the Guldener family could again return to their house.

In the second half of March after the breakdown of the German front on the Saar, the Americans evacuated the town and pulled out. They left behind much munitions, cartridges, powder, cable, boxes and other useful materials. The cable was used for electric wire and binding material after the war.

The Guldener family's house that had been partially destroyed during the war was repaired by the Adam Ehl company.

Martin Michels, who was nine years old at the time and lived with his parents at the Sandhof farm reports:

A group of approximately ten German soldiers, some very young, was stationed in the yard with a 20 mm anti-aircraft gun. Three American tanks with infantry came along the street toward Geisberg from Neuforweiler onto the yard. A shed and stable burned from a hit with a phosphorus shell.

His parents were with some other neighbors in the yard. The Junk family tried to extinguish the flames with buckets of water. The arrival of the Americans and machinegun fire halted the attempt to put out the fire. Four cows burned up. All of the people that were in the cellar had to come out. For the first time the children saw a muscular soldier with a dark camouflage paint on his face. The captured soldiers and the civilians were searched and naturally were required to raise their hands again. The soldiers were taken away as prisoners. Two young soldiers lay at the edge of a nearby woods where they had been killed by a mortar shell.

The civilians next had to run ahead of a tank to the nearby Sablonhof farm. It was the Michels family with three persons and the Junk family with three persons. The mother was afraid that she would be shot at the Sablonhof farm. Under continuously raised hands they went over the field in the direction of the Nachtweide district behind Altforweiler. Here in Oberdorf they were again searched in front of the Gersing house on Borrenhiwwel. At the same time a German speaking American soldier found a

slingshot in the pocket of the nine year old boy. The little boy didn't have an opportunity to throw it away. After laughing a little the soldier gave it back to him, saying that a boy had to have something.

All of the internees from Altforweiler were assigned to Peter Becker's house on Mühlenweg. Since they didn't have anything at all, they carved a wooden spoon in order to eat soup cooked in a wash pot. As a result of the overwhelmingly unsanitary conditions in this house everybody had lice in their clothing within a few days.

Maria Kugel-Hilt reported this experience:

In the evening she had gone with her mother and her Aunt Kathrin with a loaded wheelbarrow and hurried to Peter Kunzler's house where there was a better cellar. The father, who stayed at the house, and Annasch Bäu (Anna Winter), were some of the more prominent inhabitants of the Upper Village except for the Meyerhof people.

Three neighboring houses above their house were burned down by gunfire on December 1. Mathias Hilt tried to put out the fire so that it wouldn't spread to his house. With a hand signal the Americans stopped the effort to put out the fire and took Mathias Hilt to Peter Becker's house after the battle to be interned with the others. Hilt Matz who had been born in Colmen had a French passport. Because of an open wound in his leg the soldiers took him to Metz in an ambulance.

As a result of the Americans having taken so many people to Peter Becker's house above the crossing, the Hilt family was taken along with some other people to the home of the widow Crescentia Schug-Kissel. After the return from Uberherrn they were able to return to their own house in the Upper Village. So diligent were they in following the movement of the American soldiers that an American field kitchen was set up near Peter Eisenbarth-Caspar's house.

Ursula Bro reported:

Our large country family with 11 members was in the more commodious cellar of our neighbor Johann Fery. On December 1, before the onset of the American engagement, artillery fire was very terrible and he didn't believe that he was going to survive.

Our cows and those of the surrounding neighbors had been driven from the town several days before by the authorities and local helpers. Only two horses were still in the stable to use to flee with our loaded wagon, but we could never be certain of the right time to pull out. About noon on December 1 the Americans came down from the upper town with tanks and infantry fire.

On the following morning the American soldiers gave orders for the people to come out of the cellars and the sheds. The scene that the village streets offered was just unimaginable. Everywhere there were tanks, military vehicles and soldiers. Wire was soon laid to the command posts. Across the street houses burned along with sheds and stables. They had all gone over to Peter Becker's house on Mühlenweg. The soldiers had probably selected this house because it was vacant and because it could be guarded from all sides.

After about four or five days of agonizingly crowded conditions with about 90 people in Peter Becker's house on Mühlenweg, the responsible soldiers recognized the unbearable conditions of having so many people in one house and quartered several families above the intersection in the middle of town. The 11 member Bro family lived with some others in Nickel Gersing's house that had been evacuated. Their own house was occupied by the Americans.

On Christmas eve the citizens of the town had to leave and travel to Uberherrn. Because of the German Ardennes offensive the American troops had to leave the front lines here and be moved to Luxembourg. In Uberherrn there were people from Uberherrn, Berus, Altforweiler, Neuforweiler, Holzmühle and Lisdorf. Only toward the west below the railroad were houses allowed to be occupied so that every house there was now occupied.

Soon after the return from Uberherrn in the middle of January the Bro family and other families were able to return to their houses and to live in them. Again and again they were reminded to comply with military orders. A mean German speaking American threatened to shoot anyone who failed to follow orders. Fraternization of the American soldiers with the population was forbidden.

The need for provisions and groceries made it necessary for the people to provide for themselves. There was no flour available so that most of the people had no bread to eat. They hungrily watched as the soldiers ate their white bread. Standard fare was soup cooked from potatoes and vegetables. If a pig had been slaughtered there was also meat for it.

Several American soldiers had playfully shot up the free running chickens so that there weren't any more eggs. Happy scavengers gathered up the half empty cans that the strange soldiers had thrown away. Once the Franz Schneider boy found a can of butter in Peter Steinmetz' house on the Gewann, but the home owner took it away from him. That event clearly demonstrated the great need of the people.

Generally the young rascals followed the soldiers in the town more than their own men and women. One such incident resulted in much excitement. The Franz Schneider boy was going on 20 years old and was considered to be unfit to be a soldier, and along with 14 year old Albert Poncelet stole some cigarettes out of Jeep and also left some of his personal papers at the scene. After it was discovered they were brought before a military court in Uberherrn and sentenced to punishment. They had the good fortune of having a lenient judge.

It was a cold winter in January and February. Ample amounts of wood and coal were available in the houses, but the electric light bulbs remained dark, so that in the evening the oven doors were left open to give a little bit of light. Georg Guldenr, Sr. came up with the idea of using a wick in a can of shoe dubbing that the American soldiers had used.

Helene Meyer (Lena), who was 16 years old at the time and her brother Josef (Seppe), who lived in their parent's house on the Gewann, opposite what is now Spitzweg Strasse, reported these experiences when the war came to their town:

Their father had used wooden timbers to secure a cellar room in their house as a precaution against collapse.. They went down there when the artillery shelling began, along with their parents, their brother Alois (Bubi) as well as several of their neighbors who came over, including Ottilia Kunzler (Schützen Till), Peter Steinmetz and his daughter Gretel, and Josef Gammel from the crossroads (Gammelschneidersch Sepp). Everyone sought protection together from the approaching disaster. In the

afternoon the American came to the Gewann from the crossing in the middle of town shooting with tanks and infantry. Their mother ran out of the house with a white flag in her hand and a dog in her arms. Everyone else also came out of the house.

Their fate was to see a terrible scene of war. The neighboring Klein-Haas burned and part of the Kunzler-Schütz house was destroyed with wreckage and enemy soldiers everywhere. A tank turned around and they were brought to Johann Fery's house. A lot of other villagers were also there. With some alarm they saw for the first time soldiers with camouflage paint on their faces.

Above the crossing in the middle of town, between the houses of Michel Bedersdorfer and Nickel Gersing there was a tank barrier which the Germans had erected during the last days of November. The Americans had little trouble removing this laughable barrier with their bulldozers according to all eyewitnesses.

The next day all of the people who were at the Fery house on Mühlenweg were taken to Peter Becker's house by the Americans. There were about 30 persons in the group. Josef Fery who was 15 years old was wounded in the leg by a mortar shell fragment was taken by the soldiers to Metz in an ambulance. Johann Fery, his father, was named mayor of Altforweiler by the Americans. They hung a sign on him so that everybody could be able to recognize him.

Because Peter Becker's house was overflowing with 72 Altforweiler people as well as 12 from Neuforweiler and several from Holzmühle and their families, several were removed from there to other places. Initially those who were with Nickel Meyer were sent to relatives in Ottersberg, then to Michel Bedersdorfer's house. Their cattle which had been in the stables of houses on the Gewann were returned if they could catch them, although the freely roaming cows come to them on their own. According to arrangements of the Americans they put the animals in Peter Meyer's stable on the Ziegerlei. This family was able to live in their own house.

On the day before Christmas the big move to Uberherrn was arranged, travelling with their team of cattle. Several people were driven by the American soldiers by automobile, while others had to go on foot. In the middle of January they went back again to Altforweiler, as well as the people from Sandhof and Neuforweiler. Their family again went to the home of Michel Bedersdorfer. All civilians had to go back to their houses above the crossing in the middle of town except for Nickel Poncelet since he was in Nickel Bro's (Russ Papp) house. Their cows were still in the stable at Peter Meyer's house on the Ziegelhütte where they could feed and milk them. So they had milk, a rare item in this difficult time.

It was also reported that favorable conditions arose for the Americans in the course of time. In the evenings the mother stewed potatoes in milk. Only in our region could potatoes be made so well in this manner. All of the soldiers who were in Peter Gersing's house came for lunch. They brought their sorry military provisions with them.

It is possible that these soldiers had later come from immigrants from our region to North America and so were used to cooking potatoes in this manner. Also in our city there were several families that had immigrated to America in the first half of the 19th century. This episode was especially emphasized in the story.

The master baker **Johann Hass-Gammel** had remained with his wife and two daughters in Neuforweiler and did not flee the town. The daughters Resi and Maria reported on these events:

Their father did not want to leave the town in the evacuation. With a couple of cows in the street, they became a target for the fighter bombers that fired on everything, so that it was safer to stay in the cellar of the house. But the family wanted to remain in town. The family was composed of their parents, her twin sister Hildegard, age 16, another sister Maria, age 18 and a French prisoner of war whose home was in Nice where in better conditions he worked closely with his family, helping them in a rural setting.

In the summer on pretty days several of the local French prisoners met in the garden of the house. That was pointed out to the authorities and was forbidden.

As the front lines came closer in the last days of November, we were asked twice to evacuate. They gave us a one hour notice.

The father went off with the cows in the direction of the Glashütte and indicated that he was going by way of Wasgassen because it was not as dangerous as going through the town. However he had the intention of travelling to Sablonhof and there to seek protection with some relatives. But the relatives were already gone and he was not able to determine this ahead of time since there were no telephones operating at that time.

In the Sandhof, however, the Junk and Michels families still remained and were urged to stay there with them. Protection in the company of others decreased their anxiety. Artillery shells hit close by and in the field so that protection in the cellar was quickly taken. The stable was destroyed by a mortar shell and burned.

The superior forces of the Americans arrived with tanks and rested infantry. The attempt to put out the fire was suspended. Seventeen German soldiers in the farm area and with them in the cellar were taken captive. One soldier was severely wounded when a shell hit the house. The owner of the house and the prisoners had to take him on a stretcher to a nearby house in Neuforweiler.

All of the civilians and the French prisoners had to walk to Altforweiler with their hands over their heads. The rain and cold really aggravated this situation. In Altforweiler everybody was searched again for weapons and taken to Peter Becker's house for internment. The French prisoners were taken away after personal identification. Unfortunately for the Haas sisters they got one piece of bread to eat from the Altforweiler people when they arrived at Peter Becker's house.

In the house on the Kappesmühle there was a large wash pot constantly cooking, mostly with potatoes and garden vegetables when they could get them. The Altforweiler people who had slaughtered could also have meat to eat. Bread had become scarce. This state of emergency for approximately 90 people in one house lasted five days, but after that the Americans moved several Altforweiler families to houses above the intersection in the middle of town.

The day before Christmas all of the people had to go to Uberherrn. In the drawing room of the Treibahr Hotel everybody was deloused with powder. In this room the women used sewing machines to sew cold weather shirts for the nearby frontline American troops. In the Neumann Bakery bread was baked for the people, one loaf of bread for each person each week. A French prisoner who worked in the bakery for a while furnished bread to people that he was familiar with. This man was from Cherbourg.

Thirty five years after the end of the war a former French prisoner who had worked with the Haas family in Neuforweiler visited the master baker along with his wife and children. The Haas daughter Resi reported that he was from Limoges. They had been in contact by letters for a long time.

The last citizens to be evacuated were my parents, the Heinrich Schug-Rink family, and both of my brothers, Reinhold and Heinz, on the morning of November 28, 1944 at about 10:15 in the morning.

Reinhold Schug was 15 years old at the time and reports:

Even before one could begin to hear the roar of the artillery in the distance from the Lothringer lands, teams of horses carrying German settlers were fleeing up the country roads in front of our house from the Metz lands ahead of the Americans.

Originally we had decided not to leave the cows at the house. But German soldiers who days before had been put up at our house and had eaten with us believed that we should leave them there. They were certain that if they were out in the street that they would be attacked from the air. The German defeat could be clearly seen and great anxiety pervaded the people.

We had slaughtered a pig and so were well provided with meat. The cellar was full of potatoes which were plentiful from the country at this time of year. There were two cows in the stable as well as goats and chickens, and in another stable were rabbits.

On the morning of November 28 walking rapidly, came Jean Burg, the well known meat inspector from Bisten and reported that a tank had already come to Bockhof but had turned back. I was sent back to see if there were any people in the houses on the Sawel, and rode my bicycle up the Ziegelei on Felsberger Street. I didn't meet or see anybody. About that time the German artillery position on Breiten Way by the school was abandoned.

As a result of my anxiety in not seeing anyone on the Sawel, the cows were hitched to the wagon which had already been loaded and we prepared for the flight in the direction of Saarlautern. Previously I had opened all of the rabbit cages and turned the animals loose in the garden. At that moment the first mortars began to fall on the fields of the Spees and the Gewinn.

My father had the cows at the head of the procession and I road on my bicycle, while my mother and my youngest brother rode on the wagon. Before leaving the house she had blessed it with holy water for this dangerous trip. Before the Roten Hügel in the Sandkaul heights a huge tree lay across the street where it had been blown down by a mortar shell. A retreating German SPW (tank) moved it out of the way with a rope. We had to stoop over to get through the destruction in the streets.

In Neuforweiler a loaded wagon was hit by a shell and everything was scattered or destroyed. At the railroad station in Saarlautern were Altforweiler people who had fled there the day before. My father left the cows with a Fraulautern watchmaker that he knew, and he took them on to Morscholz.

After the war my father found his cows with a farmer who had some other cows in Morscholz. He offered him money and three times went back on the bicycle but the man would not give him his cows back. The authorities wouldn't help either.

How poor the war had made the people and others so miserable. On November 28, 1944 the last train left the railroad station at Saarlouis, now Saarlautern, with those fleeing into the open country toward Bavaria.

Josef Fery, then 16 years old and wounded on the morning of December 1, reported:

With his neighbor Nickel Bro he stood at the back door of the house, both awaiting the coming day with uncertainty. An artillery or mortar shell hit the annex barn. The neighbor's barn was not harmed, but he got a piece of shrapnel in his upper thigh. The following day, in great pain, the Americans took him in an ambulance to Diedenhofen. After the wound was taken care of - the shrapnel remained in his leg - he came to the civilian hospital. Here he stayed several weeks and subsequently was taken to the convent in Niedaltdorf for further care and recuperation. As a result of a new infection in the wound, he was taken to the hospital in Wallerfangen the end of March.

His father, Johann Fery, had been named mayor of Altforweiler by the Americans. Because of his responsibility for enforcing the military laws a big sign to that effect was hung about his neck so that the soldiers would recognize him.

In order to ensure provision of bread for the civilians, the Uberherrn mill needed to grind the grain that had been harvested during the summer. The waterwheel in the Bist delivered the drive and the power since there was no electricity. In the Neumann Bakery the bread was baked after which the mayor summoned Johann Fery to hitch his horses to the wagon and bring the bread from Uberherrn. According the assertions of those who were there, this was not even sufficient.

At the conclusion of this research I want to thank all of those who have made contributions, so that this history of our town and the intervening 55 years since the end of the war could be documented. Especially I thank those towns people who, as young persons, gave eyewitness accounts of the war in our town and experienced the coming of the Americans.

Thanks to the American war veterans, who through letters, photographs and official military reports, described with accuracy the events of the time and the circumstances of the war.

Thanks to Walter Oehling from Altforweiler, who through his internet contacts over the wireless system was able to put together this extensive account.

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Werner Schug

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